

Good Friday

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“It is through everyday life in community and the love that must be incarnate in this, that handicapped people can begin to discover that they have a value, that they are loved and so are lovable.” (Jean Vanier: *Community and Growth*, 1989, p. 11.) In turn, these so-called “broken” people transform those who live with them by a mutual giving and receiving of each other’s gifts.

Currently there are over 1700 people with developmental disabilities living in mental health institutions and nursing homes in Georgia. Friends of L’Arche Atlanta is striving to open a L’Arche home in 2010. While we will only be able to welcome a small number of people to our first home, L’Arche will serve as a witness that adults with developmental disabilities can thrive outside of institutional living. L’Arche is a sign of hope in a broken world.

As we walked toward Station 13 a woman approached me and asked for a copy of my reflection. She has both a daughter and a niece with disabled children and believed it would give them hope to hear that their children had gifts to be given and received. That was worth the trek for me. I was also inspired by the 13 other presenters’ passion for their causes, each of which was an important justice issue.

IDENTITY OF L’ARCHE

We are people, with and without developmental disabilities, sharing life in communities of faith. Mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of our life together. We seek to build a world that recognizes the unique value of every person and our need of one another.

The MISSION OF L’ARCHE is

*To make known the gifts of people with developmental disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships;
To engage in our diverse cultures, working together toward a more human society;
To foster community that is inspired by the core values in our founding story and responds to the changing needs of our members.*



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A sign of hope in a broken world...

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A Sign of Hope in a Broken World

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Honeymooning with L’Arche

Laura Magistro Wells
Board President

I am honored and excited to to serve as President for the Friends of L’Arche board for this upcoming term. In the past year, I have been blessed to meet so many different people who are interested in and have a passion for L’Arche. The more I talk to others, the more I realize that the community we are trying to build appeals to everyone because we are fundamentally talking about relationships that matter.

Many of you know that I lived in L’Arche in Inverness, Scotland in the early 1990’s after graduating from college. I lived with 14 other people and together we created one pretty incredible group. We had our share of disagreements, but each night we sat together at the dinner table, lit a candle, and shared a prayer so beautiful. In these gatherings, all of the day’s tensions would melt away. Some of



my fellow community members were non-verbal, some had limited mobility, and one was visually impaired. Each community member, in his or her own way, touched me at my core. They welcomed me with a smile no matter how grumpy I was from getting up at 6:30am and they forgave my mistakes so many times that I began to learn that it was possible for me to forgive myself as well.

I was having a hard time forgiving myself five years later when my new husband Talley and I were boarding a plane

for our honeymoon to Paris. Since leaving L’Arche Inverness in 1994, I had been back to visit once in 1997 and I knew that it might be a few years before I had the money to go back and visit again. Here I was going to Europe, but I wasn’t visiting my community. Talley and I simply could not figure out how to work a trip to Scotland into our week in France without making the entire

honeymoon too exhausting and too expensive. So, I felt some guilt -- even though it was our honeymoon. Two days into our stay in Paris, as we were walking down the street in the Orleans district I happened to look across the street and there in the middle of Paris was Tracy, a core member with whom I lived in L’Arche in Scotland. She was standing, seemingly by herself, shaking her head back and forth. I shook my head, too, as I was certain that I was seeing a miracle.

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Paris Honeymoon

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Then, Mark and Cathol and two assistants I did not know came to join her and I shouted to Talley with glee. I didn't even know there was a L'Arche house in Paris, but it turns out that L'Arche Inverness and L'Arche Paris had done a house swap for the August holiday and many of my friends and community members from L'Arche Inverness were staying in Paris for the week.

God had answered a secret prayer! We enjoyed several days of sightseeing in Paris with our friends from Scotland and their presence was again healing for me. It also confirmed that I had married an incredible man! Talley not only didn't mind that we had company on our honeymoon but he, too, was happy to see the dear friends that he had come to know during his visits to L'Arche Inverness.

Even though, with two small children, I don't get to Scotland these days, I don't feel the same guilt and sadness that I once did. God spoke to me through my Inverness friends that week in Paris and reminded me that the friendships and relationships we form only deepen in the heart over time. This is the beauty of L'Arche in my life and why I am so excited about building a L'Arche community here in Atlanta. I can't wait to see what will grow from the seeds that we've been planting. I am certain that God will speak to so many through the relationships that will blossom right here in our city.

A "Good" Good Friday

Judy Miller

Board of Directors

This past Good Friday I was privileged to represent Friends of L'Arche Atlanta, Inc. and offer one of the reflections that are given at each of the 14 Stations of the Cross during the 29th annual Good Friday Pilgrimage in downtown Atlanta. Almost 200 people walked, sang and prayed at landmarks around the city serving as Stations of the Cross to recall Jesus carrying the cross to his death. As I left my home early Friday morning, it was thundering, lightning and pouring, however, as I got closer to the city the rain had evaporated and the five-mile, four-hour pilgrimage proceeded under a threatening but rainless sky.

The pilgrimage is a multicultural and an interfaith event that presents social injustices in the world and challenges the marchers to connect them with the sufferings Jesus endured.

According to Susan Stevenot Sullivan director of the Parish & Social Justice Ministries of Catholic Charities Atlanta which sponsors the event, "the focus is always for people to look at Jesus' suffering today among us, with each station providing an opportunity to increase our awareness of a justice issue."

I was the speaker at Station 12 which depicts when Jesus dies. The theme was disabilities. Parts of my presentation follows:

No doubt when Jesus died the Apostles and disciples thought that it was a disaster. The same can be said for many parents whose child is born with a disability. They view it as a disaster. How can a disaster be turned into a blessing? What does it take?

To live out our call from Jesus to have a preferential option for the least of our brothers and sisters, we need to "see" the disabled as made in the image and likeness of God just as we are. In a recent obituary of Emory University theologian Nancy Eiseland, herself a disabled person, it was noted that she complained "for all Christianity's professed concern for the poor and oppressed, the disabled were ignored."

She reminded us that "anyone can become disabled at any time, and that those without disabilities are "the temporarily able-bodied." She pointed out that when the risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles He invited them to touch his wounds. His wounds were still a part of Him, which can allow the disabled to identify with a "disabled" God.

In the communities of L'Arche, people with and without developmental disabilities, share life together. . . In L'Arche mutual relationships and trust in God are at the heart of life together. They seek to build a world that recognizes the unique value of every person and our need of one another.

L'Arche is special, in the sense that we are trying to live in community with people who are mentally handicapped. Certainly we want to help them grow and reach the greatest independence possible. But before "doing for them," we want to "be with them." The particular suffering of the person who is mentally handicapped, as of all marginalized people, is a feeling of being excluded, worthless and unloved.

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Springing Into Giving, FOLA Spring Fundraiser

Austin Dickson

Board of Directors

On Thursday evening, March 26, about 80 people gathered at the *Old Courthouse* on the Square for Friends of L'Arche Atlanta's spring fundraiser. The event began with light hors d'oeuvres and conversation amongst friends both new and old. Once everyone found a seat, Daniel Skandera, a fellow with Down Syndrome who won the initial Itzhak Perlman Award, played several selections on a marimba, a type of percussion instrument. Daniel entertained the crowd with a broad repertoire, including an amazing rendition of "Flight of the Bumblebee."



David Jenkins stands with two Friends of L'Arche Atlanta Board Members, Judy Miller and Betti Knott

Following the musical performance, board chair, Laura Magistro Wells, introduced the special guest speaker, Dr. David Jenkins, professor of Faith and the City at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and for-

mer president of L'Arche USA. Dr. Jenkins shared about his experiences in L'Arche and his time as an assistant at a London community.

The evening closed with many new friends eager to support Friends of L'Arche Atlanta! We received pledges from many individuals and raised approximately \$7,000! The board of Friends of L'Arche Atlanta is thankful for Daniel's gifts and David's leadership as well as all those who came out

to support this special vision and mission. The board is also profoundly grateful to Lee Ann Trzcien-ski, Talley Wells, and all the volunteers who made this event such a tremendous success.

We give thanks to and pray for our recent donors:

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